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ABSTRACT

This paper explores various aspects of training preschool teachers in the Federal Republic of Germany to cooperate with parents in the education of their children. An initial discussion of teacher training programs in Germany focuses on the lack of a theoretical concept of socialization and social work as a basis for working with parents, and the resulting lack of daily application of such theoretical concepts. An analysis of the reasons for these difficulties, accompanied by specific arguments in favor of training teachers to work with parents, comprises the largest section of the paper. Laws, government guidelines, and literary and educational works supportive of this aspect of teacher training are analyzed, and expected forms of parent participation as well as those which have been practiced and tested are briefly described. Facets of active parent-teacher cooperation include joint responsibility towards the child, cooperative supervision, improvement of the educational competence of both parent and teacher, and a positive side-effect on social contacts and activities in the neighborhood and the community. An additional form of parent-teacher communication, written communication (providing information, reinforcement, and support) is briefly commented upon. Finally, a review of research on parent-teacher cooperative strategies in various schools in the Federal Republic of Germany is presented. (CM)

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Co-operation between parents, pre-school and the community :

THE TRAINING OF PRE-SCHOOL TEACHERS WITH A VIEW TO CO-OPERATION WITH PARENTS

(FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY)

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COMMITTEE FOR GENERAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Co-operation between parents, pre-school and the community

THE TRAINING OF PRE-SCHOOL TEACHERS WITH A VIEW TO CO-OPERATION WITH PARENTS

(FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY)

by

Gerhard Pause

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In the Federal Republic of Germany, pre-school education as a continuation and complement of family education takes place not only in kindergartens and play groups but also at school, in Vorklassen (nursery classes) and Eingangsstufen (infant classes) within the Primarbereich (primary school).

In pre-school institutions, it may thus be assumed that, in addition to nursery school teachers and Sozialpädagogen (teachers specialised in social education), there are also teachers who, apart from their work in the nursery and infant classes, have been trained above all to teach in the normal infant and junior schools.

When the word "teacher" is used generally hereinafter, then it denotes all people working in play groups, kindergartens, nursery and infant schools, as well as the trained nursery school teachers, social pedagogues and teachers in pre-schools and/or primary schools.

The training of these three groups varies: nursery school teachers are trained at Fachschulen (colleges for the training of nursery school teachers), the social pedagogues at Fachhochschulen (college where the latter are trained), and people wishing to do an MA in social education and teachers are trained at colleges of education or universities.

The entry requirements for each course of studies also vary. As a rule, the Abitur (A-levels) is required for admission to the colleges of education and the universities. There are also considerable differences with regard to the length of the training, the organisation of the curriculum and the contents of the training course. The training of nursery school teachers and social pedagogues is very closely connected with practical work, whereas graduates in social education undergo a training which is less connected with practice and much more theoretical. This also applies to the preparations for co-operation with parents, at least where this is being carried out.

Another special feature of educational training in the Federal Republic of Germany is that there are no uniform guidelines for all the federal states. With regard to the training and study regulations, the states of colleges/universities are responsible for setting up their own regulations which differ widely from one another. They regulate primarily the formal aspects of the course of training or course of studies in question, and as they are in the form of guidelines, they give the individual educational institutions more latitude for interpretation and development.

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At this level, if at all, the training regulations refer to "work with parents" or "parent participation" only in a very general form. This may at least be seen as a sign that parent participation is considered necessary and desirable as an educational subject. The individual educational institutions and often also the staff concerned decide on the contents and to what extent the subject of "co-operation with parents" can be taken up in the training of teachers. This makes it difficult to draw comparisons and general conclusions about how well and extensively teachers are prepared during their training for co-operation with parents. There is no doubt a considerable discrepancy between the possibilities outlined in books and what is actually taught during training. It is difficult to determine this more exactly when using study regulations and college/university calendars, because "co-operation with parents" is not always explicitly mentioned as the title of a course but is implied in courses dealing with "theories of socialisation", "family sociology", or with "problems concerning the transition from the home to the school".

Courses, where one would expect to deal with the topic of "work with parents" may be found in nearly all the study regulations and calendars, but most of them are not obligatory or are so arranged with regard to the curriculum that a thorough training for co-operation with parents is out of the question during the first stage of a student's education. Courses which tend to be offered again and again are as follows:

1. Lectures or seminars, which endeavour to provide a theoretical foundation and establish a plan for the co-operation of parents and pre-school teachers,

2. Practical courses, which seek to provide information about forms and ways of implementation for the meeting with parents.

3. Courses involving small groups, where examples taken from co-operation with parents are simulated and actualised by role playing. This may, at the same time, contribute to self-experience, and

4. Situations during practical work, where questions arising about co-operation with parents are taken up immediately and solved, either by the students themselves, or in their presence, by the teachers working at that particular institution.

All four course types are to be found, and in this pure or mixed form should be an integral part of all education dealing with teaching at the pre-school stage and thus of the training for co-operation with parents. The first two forms can be seen to appear more frequently in the offers of colleges and universities, whereas the other two, which are more strongly oriented towards

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practical work, are found more frequently in Fachschulen and Fachhochschulen. There is the danger of training being one-sided and too theory-oriented owing to the difficulty in transferring the acquired knowledge to practice which will always be unsatisfactory and cause those concerned to become frustrated, because everything is measured against the claims and logic of theoretical statements. It cannot be done according to the way it is taught.

A too one-sided orientation towards action and practice also causes problems. There is the danger of producing recipes, which can neither be substantiated nor given enough thought, and, when used in conflicts, show a lack of the necessary flexibility and the use of good convincing arguments.

The most desirable solution would be a combination of a theoretical introduction, a thorough mental processing of the ideas and practical instruction. This would, however, require a lot of time and staff. Neither of these are available to a sufficient degree for a pre-school training course, in which the qualification for the work with parents is only a small part.

One should also bear in mind that, at Fachschulen and colleges/universities, neither the necessity of extensive work with parents nor the problems concerned with this are recognised, so that the decisive motivation for the acquisition of the necessary knowledge and capacity to act is still lacking here.

A recently conducted poll revealed that from among 30 teachers only 12 had received their information about parent participation during their training; 18, on the other hand, had received theirs in further education courses. Not one of 14 infant school teachers had been informed about co-operation with parents during their training. 7 had received their information in further education courses. These statements coincide to a large extent with personal experiences and remarks made by other authorities on the subject (Schleicher 1973, page 7).

Hence the training of pre-school teachers for co-operation with parents - this can always only be a partial qualification among the others which are to be acquired - appears as a fragmentary group of courses, that are unmotivated by the problems which inevitably arise daily at pre-schools, and that deal exhaustively with fundamental principles and their applicability. These courses reveal that the connection to a useful theory is lacking as well as the development of an independent capacity to act.

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It turns out that the majority of pre-school teachers acquire the necessary qualification - if at all - after they have finished their training. Only when they are confronted with the real problems and thus called upon to co-operate with the parents do they feel motivated to do some private study or attend further education courses. One first learns about the numerous possibilities to work with the parents when one is actually in the classroom. Work with parents proves to be a concept which is first realised with its difficulties in practice, and it gains its value through daily discussions.

Accordingly, the teachers' qualifications for co-operation with the parents - even from the point of view of social work - are in general left to chance instead of being made compulsory for all in the form of training and further education courses.

The teachers involved in experiments are exceptions, because they are, as a rule, working under scientifically controlled conditions and directed to close co-operation with the parents.

However, if the training for the co-operation with parents is unsatisfactory and there is frequently no co-operation, this is certainly not due to a lack of guidelines or suitable literature (see bibliography). There is enough available to serve not only as a basis for any training but also as an aid for the teacher who is already working. It is not the originality and abundance of ideas which are lacking, but the connection of work with parents with a theoretical concept of socialisation and social work, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, a teachable strategy of how to put ideas into a practical capacity to act as far as daily teaching is concerned.

The reasons for the present difficulties are not due to the fact that existing knowledge and information cannot be imparted. On the contrary, they are to be found in the following reasons:

1. In the short and often traditionally structured educational training courses, which are overloaded with other subjects, parent participation still has not received the value to which it is entitled.

2. The training is oriented so little towards practice and everyday problems that there is a lack of insight into the necessity and possibilities of co-operation with the parents, and hence there is no motivation to deal with this theme.

3. The legal basis for parent-teacher co-operation still has not been properly settled, especially where it is a question of active participation in the kindergarten or in the school, and as far as supervision and health matters are concerned.

4. Co-operation with parents cannot be learned only by the imparting of information and acquiring of knowledge. When parents and teachers meet, numerous emotional, social and partly irrational moments play a certain role. Rationally, they are neither comprehensible nor rescindable. These are found in the following:

- in their language and behaviour, teachers orient themselves towards the middle class and thus disconcert lower-class parents and so do not get through to them;

- the teachers adopt an official and formal role of behaviour which makes them seem to be in authority and so forces the parents into the role of children;

- the teachers have had more education and acquired greater knowledge than the parents, who have usually had less education;

- the parents are disturbed by memories of their own school days and this is expressed in inhibitions and a lack of self-confidence with regard to the kindergarten and school. This hinders any co-operation;

- teachers are unable to stand any criticism or let themselves be endangered in their position of authority by the parents. This leads them unconsciously to avoid contacts with parents;

- problems are caused by the differences in the parents' education and their competitive behaviour with regard to one another.

Not only cognitive instruction is needed to overcome these and other barriers, but also behavioural training, which can no doubt be carried out only under guidance and when dealing daily with children and their parents. In this way, changes in attitudes and modes of behaviour may be brought about.

Up till now, the lack of possibilities has been mentioned and the difficulties have been pointed out which still stand in the way of a desirable training of pre-school teachers for co-operation with parents in the Federal Republic of Germany, but one must also mention that laws, guidelines and numerous literary contributions have created favourable conditions for such a training.

Article 5, paragraph 2 of the basic law of the Federal Republic of Germany states: "The care and education of the child is the natural right of the parents and their main duty". When the child enters a pre-school or school institution, these rights and duties are neither set aside nor impaired.

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According to Section 3, paragraph 1 of the Jugendwohlfahrtgesetz (law concerning youth welfare), pre-school institutions as a part of the public youth services should support and complement the child's education, which has already started in the family. This may also be generally applied to the looking after of the five and six-year-olds at school. These basic regulations are supported by the fact that, in school and kindergarten laws and decrees, parents are granted the right to representation with regard to the kindergarten and the school. This right brings them, as the elected representatives and also as a whole, together with the teachers at parents' evenings. Although only formal democratic provisions are concerned here, this opens up the possibility of a profitable co-operation of parents and pre-school teachers, where not only formal functions must be fulfilled but also where matters concerning the contents can be discussed as well as problems which concern both sides. Numerous recommendations and suggestions for this day may be found in educational recommendations and guidelines. The following examples illustrate this:

The Bildungsgesamtplan (educational plan) published in 1973 by the Bund-Länder Kommission für Bildungsplanung (federal government-state Commission for Educational Planning) lays down the basis for parent participation in nursery and primary schools. Education is not seen as an isolated field but as part of the field of social relations into which it needs to be integrated. It is seen as being bound up with economic developments, the special features of the employment system and the difficulty in making statements about the future behaviour of people in a society.

"Education and training complementary to that of the family" is used when referring to the nursery school. This inevitably implies the involvement of the parents, who should be kept constantly informed by disclosing to them as extensively as possible developments in the curriculum. To quote from the passage dealing with the necessity of involving parents: "The development should start out from the attempts which have already been made in the nursery and primary school. This requires close co-operation of the parents, teachers, administration and institutions concerned"(Bildungsgesamtplan I, 1973, page 20 - Educational Plan). These statements go back to recommendations in the "Strukturplan für das Bildungswesen" (Structural Plan for Education) which had been made already in 1970 by the Deutscher Bildungsrat (German Education Council). With regard to participation in education, the council said as follows: "The possibilities opened to the pupil now provide him and his parents with greater influence on decision making and hence more responsibility than in the past school system .... An extensive system of educational counselling must be available so that pupils and parents can take this responsibility for decisions concerning the school career and course of training. According to the degree of responsibility, the people concerned should be allowed to participate in making decisions on study courses and regulations affecting school life. The pupils and the parents' councils will be faced with new tasks" (Strukturplan für das Bildungswesen 1970, page 38).

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Especially for the nursery school, it is pointed out that a good kindergarten programme must take the needs and interests of the parents into consideration "by regarding the socio-cultural background of the children when drawing up the programme and by having teachers advising and involving the parents in the planning" (Strukturplan, 1970, page 115). Despite nothing being said about the training of the teachers for co-operation with the parents, mention is made of the desirable connection between kindergarten and the home. This indirectly requires qualified teachers: "From the time the child starts kindergarten, close co-operation between kindergarten and home is necessary. The parents should be regularly informed about their children's development and be provided with information so that they can understand and support the work of the kindergarten. Difficulties which arise should be discussed together with the parents, and other forms of active (author's italics) co-operation of the parents in the kindergarten should be developed"(Strukturplan, 1970, page 119).

Similar arguments are found with regard to the time when children start school:

"It is important, especially when children start school, that the teachers should do more than before to gain the parallel and active co-operation and understanding of the parents. On no account must the school understand its task in such a way that it is 'granted custody' of the children from a certain age on; on the contrary, it must try to actively recruit the support of the parents by providing information for this purpose. Parents as well as teachers can both profit from co-operation between parents and school, which is already the case in many places but still not widespread enough. With such co-operation the efforts of the school can be supported by the parents. Knowledge of the family is essential background information for the teacher with regard to forming a complete picture of the child's ability to learn. Objections constantly being publicised that the school, with the increasing accumulation of duties, is contributing to further 'cultural impoverishment' of the family cannot be upheld when taking into account the express duties of the school. This is the real point to make parents who do not have these requirements aware of their responsibility, and also to achieve a reasonable form of co-operation between the home and the school for the good of the child. However, this must not lead to the children in this way being charged with things neglected by the school" (Strukturplan, 1970, page 126).

These observations are strongly supported by the recommendations of the Deutscher Bildungsrat (German Education Council) - "Zur Einrichtung eines Modellprogramms für Curriculumentwicklung im Elementarbereich"(On establishing a programme for curriculum development in the nursery school) and "Verstärkte Selvstständigkeit der Schule und Partizipation der Lehrer, Schüler und Eltern" (Increased independence of the school and participation of teachers, pupils and parents). "Bearing in mind the advancement of all children as defined in the programme, all possible tension concerned with the family socialisation must be counterbalanced, and all conflict between the home educational environment and the nursery school must be avoided"(Empfehlung zur Einrichtung eines Modell-programms für Curriculumentwicklung im Elementarbereich, 1973, P.63).

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"The nursery school and the family should not only co-operate because there is an obligation to co-ordinate and counterbalance the various styles of education; another motive is to be seen in the realisation of democratic rights of co-determination"(Modellprogramm Elementarbereich, 1973, P.64). In this it is clearly pointed out that the previous forms of parent participation very quickly reach their limits when attempts are made to abolish social differences. Therefore, there is the suggestion to extend parent participation to the work of curriculum development: "First, it is a matter of legitimating the didactic units by involving all people concerned .... secondly, emphasis must be laid on strengthening the ability of the parents to make decisions in educational matters and in information processes"(Modellprogramm Elementarbereich, 1973, P.65/66).

Educational work in the nursery school which does not involve parents is doomed to fail because it comes to alienation and role conflicts between the parents on the one hand, and between the children and the teachers on the other. Hence it is "not only a matter of teachers counselling parents but equally of parents counselling teachers. A mutual learning process between home and school is needed in all possible forms. This co-operation is even more important than the expansion of committees of representatives" (Empfehlung Verstärkte Selbständigkeit der Schule und Partizipation der Lehrer, Schüler und Eltern, 1973, page 29). The publications of the Bund-Länder Kommission für Bildungsplanung (federal government-state commission for Educational Planning) and the Deutscher Bildungsrat (German Education Council), which may be taken as recommendations, are reflected to varying degress in the wording of guidelines, aids and instructions for kindergartens, nursery schools and infant schools.

In the guidelines and aids there is less discussion of social aspects and reasons and more concentration on describing the possibilities and forms of parent-teacher co-operation as well as pointing out the problems and conflicts which may arise. At the same time, all the guidelines and aids, without exception, stress the need for co-operation. The main reasons for co-operation with the parents are the creation or preservation of continuity in the development of the child as well as the compensation for differences in the parents' and teachers' attitudes and behaviour with regard to education. Special stress is invariably laid upon the social reference of work with parents, which, in particular, aims at improving the educational chances of children who come from less privileged and socially disadvantaged families.

Parent-teacher co-operation is meant to prevent conflicts between the home, kindergarten and school from being carried out on the backs of the children, "so that there are no serious disturbances, which manifest themselves in regression and aggression and thus hinder useful co-operation"(Rahmenrichtlinien für die Eingangsstufe des Primarbereichs - Entwurf, Hannover, 1975, page 29 - Draft guidelines for the infant school). "It is necessary to compensate for possible tension to save the child from conflicts of authority and competence and the resulting lack of self-confidence"

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(Vorläufige Rahmenrichtlinien für die vorschulische Erziehung im Saarland, 1973, Section 6 - Interim guidelines for pre-school eduation). On the contrary, the child is meant to profit from the meeting of parents and teachers whereby the co-operative behaviour of the adults serves as a model for the child's own social behaviour, less discrepancy between the pre-school and home is experienced, and there is an improvement in the educational work in the kindergarten and school when mothers and fathers are involved. Of all the existing guidelines the recommendations made by Lower Saxony concerning educational work in kindergartens deal with parent co-operation in greatest detail. They were first made available to the public in February 1977. "Parent-teacher co-operation presupposes that the s a m e aims are being pursued or aims which have been co-ordinated with one another. Parents and teachers help one another (author's italics) with the improving of educational competence i.e. especially with the ability to understand the task of early childhood education, to correctly assess the socialisation background of the children, to support educational measures properly, and to critically examine the aims of education. The needs and interests of the children, parents and teachers as well as environmental demands have to be taken into consideration" (Empfehlungen zur pädagogischen Arbeit im Kindergarten - Entwurf, Hannover 1976, P. 33 - Draft recommendations for educational work in the kindergarten).

It is quite clear from these remarks that the educational competence of both parties varies. As a rule, parents know their children better than teachers and have known them for a much longer time, but their experiences are usually limited to the family circle. As a result of their training, teachers are, however, more qualified to understand child behaviour and do not experience the children singly but in the peer groups of the kindergarten and school. On the basis of their knowledge and experience, both parties can complement one another considerably and, therefore, should look for ways of good productive co-operation.

This way cannot be seen, or only very inadequately, in the setting up of committees of representatives. The fulfilment of the tasks "requires less contact at the top level between officially elected representatives of the parents and the kindergarten; more contact is required at a wider level between all parents and teachers"(Empfehlungen für die Arbeit im Kindergarten - Entwurf, Hannover 1976, P.34)". As many parents as possible are to be involved, and co-operation starts with the decision on the general tendency of education. The teacher can expect the parents to support his work only if he succeeds in convincing them of the task of pre-school education. "They have to see it for themselves." (Empfehlungen für die Arbeit im Kindergarten - Entwurf, Hannover 1976. P.34). He needs this support not only for his own work but also "if he wants his educational work transferred from the kindergarten situation to that of the family, and if he wants it to be successful for a long term"(Empfehlungen für die Arbeit im Kindergarten - Entwurf, Hannover 1976, P.34).

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Before such intensive and productive work with parents can be expected, the parents' support for co-operation must be won. Up till now - apart from in some experiments - this has not been done with much success, or it was only for a short time. The initiative to activate the parents should come from the kindergarten or school, which should, as a rule, be capable of having a greater insight into the problems and better knowledge of the help needed. This report has repeatedly shown that, in many cases, the training and self-confidence of pre-school teachers in the Federal Republic of Germany still do not correspond to the ideas formulated in books or to the demands arising from practice. This deplorable fact must not mislead people into thinking that - apart from any exceptions - co-operation with parents has been started or should be introduced. In any case, the teachers should feel called upon to discuss it with the parents and encourage them to co-operate. This may often appear to be a risky undertaking when considering the present lack of training, experience and self-confidence, but reports from teachers (Prüser 1970; School 1976; Sennlaub 1976; among others) who, acting on their own initiative, co-operated with parents, show that the teachers gain knowledge, experience and self-confidence from the process of meeting with the parents, and this makes it easier to approach the parents at further meetings.

At such meetings "it is relatively easy to win support for participation and co-operation from parents interested in education from the upper classes. They are not only able to communicate with the teachers but generally have ideas about education which are similar to those of the school and the kindergarten. Therefore, special attention should be paid to motivating parents who, because of their social background and their own experiences of learning, do not know how to behave adequately and who are unable to communicate properly with the school, the kindergarten and their representatives" (Deutscher Bildungsrat, 1975, page 95 - German Education Council).

The Deutscher Bildungsrat's recommendations point out once again that the training of teachers for co-operation with the parents is absolutely essential and that it must not all be left to personal initiative and individual risk. There is no doubt that far-reaching experiences, changes in attitude and self-confidence can only be gained in the long run by dealing with the parents; the training should, however, be concerned with going beyond the knowledge of social and educational arguments and informing the future teachers and social pedagogues about techniques, basic legal problems and possible forms of co-operation with parents.

Where this is actually the case, mainly the conventional, tested and less problematical forms of parent participation are taught in the training.

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First and foremost there are the regular and usually obligatory meetings, which are regulated by law or decree. At such parents' meetings or evenings, the representatives of the parents' are usually elected, the teachers give their reports and organisational problems are discussed. Occasionally educational topics are touched on and discussed. At such meetings the initiative is normally left strictly to the teachers, who are better qualified than the parents, so that the parents' involvement is usually limited to the asking of questions.

Consultation hours and open days for parents, which are held at regular intervals, produce just as little communication. Here the parents come individually with petitions and questions. As a rule, only individual problems are touched on - mostly those of their own children. The teachers offer solutions, but there is no room here for a discussion about perhaps the position of the individual child in relation to the group as a whole or from the point of view of other parents. If the parents receive positive information about their child, they go home satisfied. If the information is negative, they become worried but are left to themselves with the problem.

Visits to the homes, as important as they may be as experience for a teacher, also belong in the category of conventional parent-teacher meetings of low communication value. Both parties are uneasy: the teacher intrudes into the intimacy of the family situation, the parents as hosts want to have everything appear in a favourable light. There will be little chance of obtaining any objective information. These forms of parent participation as they have been practised are now no longer sufficient with regard to active co-operation involving both parents and teachers and must be extended. A mutual learning process of all concerned is more important than further expansion of committees of representatives, in which only a few parents are found. They are usually the ones who are already involved in any case. The counselling of parents by teachers must be complemented by the counselling of teachers by parents. Under these conditions, the usual form of parents' meetings, where parents receive information from the teachers, is not really suitable for co-ordinating the educational co-operation of the home and school. Forms of co-operation must be planned in such a way that it is possible for the parents to gradually lose their inhibitions with regard to school, and also for them to ask questions themselves, to discuss matters with teachers and to criticise objectively. (Deutscher Bildungsrat, 1975, pages 96-97 - German Education Council).

In their training teachers must, therefore, get to know and practise forms of parent participation, whereby parents are called on for active co-operation, objective criticism and for involvement in common educational matters concerning both sides.

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"The teacher who invites parents to co-operate must take into account that parents have a strange feeling as far as the kindergarten and other public institutions are concerned. In work with parents, an environment is needed which creates an informal cosy atmosphere." (Empfehlungen zur pädagogischen Arbeit im Kindergarten - Entwurf, Hannover 1976, P.36 - Draft recommendations for work in the kindergarten). This is the prerequisite needed to make the activation and involvement of the parents possible. This can be achieved in various ways:

- The parents put forward their suggestions for further co-operation and plan the course parent participation will take by themselves.

- Educational topics and plans for work in the kindergarten or in the school are given. The parents discuss these in small groups and later submit them at the parents' meeting to be voted on.

- "Educational topics and problems from the living situation of the parents do not always need to be only discussed; there can also be role playing and planning games as well as the making of collages" (Empfehlungen für die Arbeit im Kindergarten - Entwurf, Hannover 1976, P.37).

- The teacher could first put forward suggestions for learning and games in which the parents take part just like their own children experience every day at the kindergarten or school.

In all the examples which have been mentioned, the main point is the active participation of the parents, whereby they can gain experience and be encouraged to ask questions and discuss problems, for which they did not feel competent up till now.

Apart from parents' evenings or meetings in the form described, there should be, however, meetings in which also the children take part. This could be done in the customary form with children showing their parents something, but it would be even better if they let their parents share in their pre-school activities and encourage them to take part. This is already often the case when parents accompany groups of children on school walks, or on visits to the zoo or the swimming baths. It is probably less common in the form of voluntary and open play afternoons in the kindergarten or the school. The teachers are usually present at these activities, so that there are many opportunities to ask questions and talk about things in an informal way.

Although recommended again and again in books and guidelines, it is less common to find parents "sitting in on" games and lessons. This is not to be confused with an "open day", when, once a year, mothers and fathers pour into kindergartens and schools to admire their children. What is really meant is an opening up of

institutions in the sense of a progressive concept of parent participation so that parents may pay a visit in principle at any time. The mere sitting in on lessons and passive observation are considered only as a starting point for an active involvement of the parents in the games and lessons. As a result of the observation, questions arise, difficulties are seen and the motivation for active co-operation grows. This may be seen when:

- parents look after individual children when they are painting, cutting out things, getting dressed etc, and help them with problems concerning learning which they cannot manage by themselves;

- under the direction of the teacher, parents undertake to look after groups which are put together from the point of view of interest or those who need more assistance;

- parents support the teacher as technical assistants by keeping lists, getting out materials or cleaning up, repairing toys, helping to look after animals etc;

- parents support the teacher with the planning and organisation of particular parts of the curriculum as well as in games and lessons ie they advise him from their point of view;

- in the lessons parents make use of the knowledge and skills from their occupations as electricians, dressmakers, decorators, carpenters etc.

The legal basis for active co-operation with parents with regard to problems concerning joint responsibility, supervision, educational competence, and hygiene health matters still has not been clearly settled in all the federal states. Legal objections are regrettably often raised especially when parent participation becomes inconvenient for the teacher and undesirable when difficulties are expected. An important side effect of the active participation of many parents in the educational work in the kindergarten and school is to be found in the positive effect on social contacts or activities in the neighbourhood and community:

- neighbours get to know and understand one another better;

- parents with children of the same age form interest groups;

- mothers have a little less work because they can take turns in taking and picking up children;

- minority groups (eg foreign workers and socially isolated families) are incorporated more quickly and strongly into the community;

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- parents' parties and discussion evenings are suggested and run by the parents themselves;

- the interests of the children are represented more strongly and more effectively with regard to the kindergarten, school and community.

Inasmuch as the local government authority is often responsible for a pre-school institution and thus partly responsible for the building, equipment, material and personnel, public figures like the mayors, politicians, etc will be involved in parent-teacher co-operation, and also in the educational work with children. Work with parents could only be understood as social work in the full sense of the word, if regular use were made everywhere of this possibility of involving those politically responsible in the educational work.

In conclusion, a final form of parent-teacher communication must be pointed out. Although the effects of verbal communication are comparatively slight, "letters" should be sent regularly to the parents. These would complement the co-operation, and one should not underestimate their effect with regard to information, reinforcement and support. After describing the recommended and expected forms of parent participation as well as those which have also been tested and practised in some cases, the question remains of how intensively and to what extent the co-operation of parents and pre-school teachers could be realised in practice in the Federal Republic of Germany.

In this connection there are first of all some difficulties, barriers and obstacles in the participants themselves which should be summed up:

1. The teachers' training for co-operation with parents is still so inadequate that they cannot cope with the tasks which await them in practice.

2. The legal basis for official parent representation has been fully regulated, but not for the many possibilities of informal parent participation or with regard to the contents.

3. A lack of self-confidence, fears and inhibitions on the part of both parents and teachers constitute barriers which considerably hinder any meeting, understanding and, above all, critical discussions.

4. When the groups are too large in kindergartens and schools and when most of the teachers' time is taken up with other duties, there are fewer possibilities for them to approach parents and invite them along. Time is also a problem for many parents, particularly when they go out to work themselves or have several children to look after at home.

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In spite of these obstacles, there are numerous examples of intensive and constructive parent-teacher co-operation, which parents and teachers quickly find to be helpful and relieving once it has been started successfully. Attention must be drawn to the fact, however, that most of the existing reports result from experiments which, as a rule, have been given preferential treatment with regard to better equipment, scientific help and further possibilities for the teachers to gain qualifications. This does not rule out intensive parent participation being carried out elsewhere, as verbal reports during technical discussions or further education courses for pre-school teachers confirm again and again.

In a report of the Bund-Länder Kommission für Bildungsplanung (federal government-state Commission for Educational Planning) "Five-year-olds in kindergartens, nursery schools and infant schools", there is a summing up of the 46 experiments where parent participation was put into practice. Reports show that in nearly all the experiments parent participation could be registered, but that particularly intensive forms were absent. The mere informing of the parents seemed to be of prime importance and not the active participation. Apparently the willingness to co-operate in the kindergarten was greater than in the school. It is presumed that this is due to the traditionally greater openness of the kindergarten to approaches from within the without (see Bund-Länder Kommission für Bildungsplanung 1976, pages 51-52).

Co-operation with parents was made the main point in only a few experiments. "Mention is made here of the experiment 'Decentralised kindergarten in connection with intensive parent parent participation' in Göttingen which, in its investigations, focused attention on parent co-operation as a form of parent education" (Bund-Länder Kommission für Bildungsplanung 1976, page 52). Here all the parents are called upon to co-operate. In order to be able to effectively promote the desired social-integrative educational behaviour of the parents, there are discussion sessions every two seeks in which also the teachers take part (see Niehuis 1976). Outside of the Bund-Länder Kommission report, there is reference to a research project of the Deutsches Jugend Institut (German Youth Institute) which aims at answering the question of how a wider section of the population from the socially lower classes and minority groups, who up till now have hardly been reached by the traditional concept of parent education, can be won over for parent participation (see Deutsches Jugend Institut, Jahresbericht 1975, page 15-16 - German Youth Institute, annual report). The participation of these parents appears to pose an insurmountable difficulty. "Since it is nearly always only middle and upper class parents who advocate and support pre-school assistance for their children, it is very important to interest precisely these parents of socio-economically disadvantaged groups in compiling educational solutions, and to allow the parents to organise them to a large extent" (Der Bundesminister für Bildung

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und Wissenschaft 1974 - the Minister for Education and Science). The question is how utopian this demand is, especially when it is said in the same report and also in other places that, on the one hand, "it is most important that the educational ideas advocated in experiments conform to those of the parents concerned, and this conformity is seen as essential to the success of the experiment" (page 231), and on the other hand, it is deplored "how little this knowledge is taken into account in the planning and carrying out of many experiments". In general, it goes on, "no new suggestions or plans have been devised yet for work with parents and parent participation, so that one has to fall back on the traditional methods in this field - eg parents' evenings, visits to the home, individual counselling of the parents and evenings where talks are given" (Der Bundesminister für Bildung und Wissenschaft 1974, pages 231-232) There are reports of more widely planned experiments involving parent co-operation from the big cities of Berlin (Schock 1976) and Hamburg (Schwarz 1976).

In Berlin parent participation takes place in Kindertagesstätten (day homes for children), especially in those which are in new housing areas in the city. This leads to increased contact among the young parents and helps to abolish the fear of isolation. The teachers do not offer any reports. Instead "live communication" is sought. This leads to a reduction of fear of authority, to a limited participation of all social classes and to a decrease in the number of difficulties in the transition phase when the children start school. It is important with this attempt that a transfer to other areas of social life such as work, occupation, living and adult education is intended and no doubt and no doubt could also be observed.

The Hamburg experiment is being carried out in infant schools and primary schools. 44 schools with 150 classes are involved. As the parents are meant to take an active part in the lessons, there must be some guarantee as to the reliability and regularity of their participation. In a procedure, which is felt to be very awkward, teachers, the parents' council and the conference of all teachers must all agree. In addition, the parents must produce a health certificate. They do not receive any remuneration but they are insured in every respect. However, the teacher has, as before, the authority and power to decide things. When the first report appeared in spring 1976, 607 parents had taken part in the experiment.

Before they began co-operating, they were introduced to educational work by means of parents' evenings, work in interest groups, and sitting in on lessons, which was followed by discussions. The intention of the experiment was not only to relieve the primary school teacher of some of his work but also to give the parents the possibility

- to become more familiar with the difficilties involved in educational work at school,

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- to experience their own children at school co-operating with other children,

- to get ideas for the education at home,

- to learn about the equal standing of cognitive achievements and social learning,

- to reduce the differences between school and home,

- to change their own attitudes to education, and

- to reach a position like that of a partnership with regard to teachers and neighbours.

The experiments which have been described so far may be taken as being representative of others (Institut für Frühpädagogik 1973; Krüger 1973; Lemmer 1976; Prüser 1970; Rodewald 1975; ao) and mark the direction and intensity with which the co-operation of parents and pre-school teachers in the Federal Republic of Germany is being pursued, and also the difficulties with which the children, parents, teachers and researchers involved had to struggle in order to realise the co-operation. It is indeed regrettable that up till now

- there is neither adequate training nor preparation;

- legal issues behind parent participation have not always been settled;

- parents and teachers still have their fears and inhibitions;

- the pressure of work and lack of time prevent initiative being shown towards co-operation;

- the parents' and teachers' interests diverge as a result of social circumstances (unemployment, achievement pressure, limitations on admission to colleges and universities);

- co-operation is hindered and impeded by administrative measures; and

- the social significance of co-operation for the individual neighbourhood and community still has not been properly recognised by many people.

Fortunately on the positive side

- the significance of parent participation is highly rated and seen correctly in the recommendations and guidelines for pre-school work;

- the legal basis has been properly regulated - at least as far as parent representation is concerned;

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- scientific investigations are taking an increasing interest in questions of parent participation;

- the parents have a great need for information and show a great willingness to co-operate;

- the training is to be improved; and

- there is an indication that measures will be continued everywhere where the first attempts at parent-teacher co-operation have been successful.

Experience has shown that everywhere where parents are involved in a responsible way in the education work of nursery school teachers, social pedagogues and teachers, they relieve the teachers in their work and support the kindergarten and school in their educational efforts in a helpful way. With regard to this experience, it is natural to hope that the co-operation of parents and pre-school teachers will, in future, play a much greater role not only in the training but also in everyday work.

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